

Wisconsin Child Welfare Practice Model

“How we can effectively deliver services together to Wisconsin children, youth and families”



Introduction and Purpose

Wisconsin's public child welfare practice model identifies the outcomes, values and principles, strategies and skills necessary to ensure child safety, permanence and well-being. The public child welfare system in Wisconsin, consists of the state, local agencies, private child welfare providers and tribal partners working in partnership to achieve outcomes for our children, youth and families.

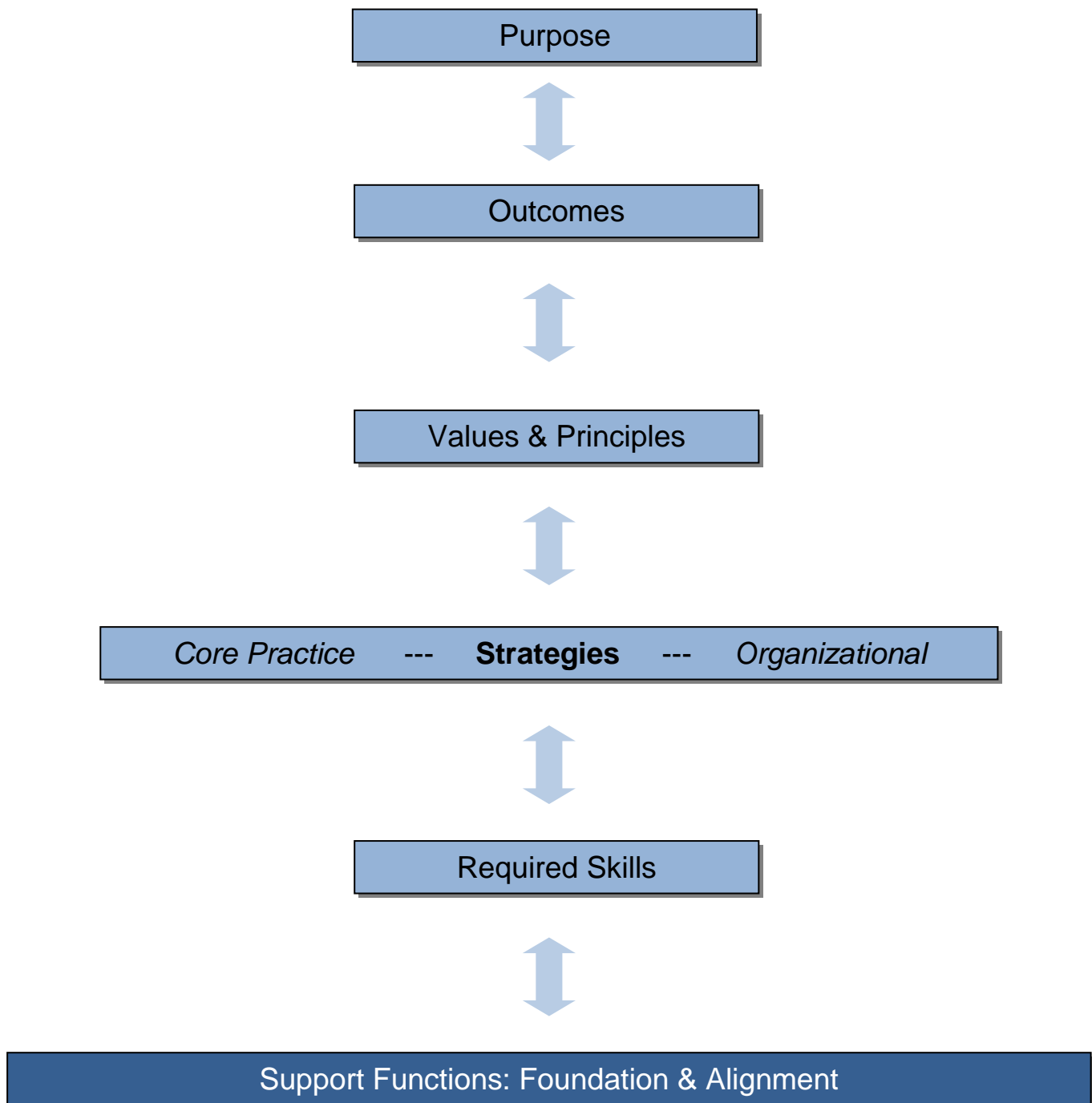
Developed in partnership with local agencies and private partners, this practice model provides a common and consistent platform to guide our mutual efforts, ensuring all children, youth and families receive effective and responsive intervention, no matter where they live in our State. Yet there are alternative paths to good practice, and innovation is important to the evolution of change oriented services. This practice model therefore establishes the parameters for good practice that deliver desired outcomes.

As Wisconsin's child welfare practices evolve, there is an increasing understanding that better results are achieved when parents, youth and children are engaged as partners with the child welfare system in securing the safety and well-being of youth/children. While we recognize that most parents want to keep their children safe, sometimes circumstances or conditions interfere with their ability to do so. When this occurs, families are best served by interventions that:

- Help them improve their ability to protect and care for their children
- Recognize and employ family strengths
- Maintain community and cultural connections
- Address threats to a child's safety, their need for protection, and risk of child maltreatment in the future.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and its county, and private partners will support families and communities by engaging in essential partnerships needed to secure positive and consistent outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve.

WISCONSIN'S PRACTICE MODEL FRAMEWORK



Outcomes

We will operate within this practice model with a goal of achieving the following outcomes for all children, youth and families who are touched by our system:

- ❖ Children are cared for in safe, permanent, and nurturing families who have the necessary skills and resources to provide for their physical and mental health, behavioral and educational needs.
- ❖ Through effective intervention, parents, caregivers and families improve their ability to develop and maintain a safe, stable environment for their children.
- ❖ Children, youth and families who we encounter are supported to achieve equitable outcomes regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, tribal status, or geography.
- ❖ Children are safely maintained in their own home, families and communities with connections, culture, and relationships preserved and established. When it is necessary to place children in out of home care, it is a safe, short and stable experience.
- ❖ Wisconsin's public child welfare staff is a diverse, professionally competent team that uses family-centered practice and demonstrates inclusiveness at all levels.

These outcomes are achieved through partnerships involving Wisconsin's public child welfare system, the state's children, youth and families as well as the communities in which they live and work.

Values and Principles

To achieve the outcomes identified above, we are committed to, and guided by, the following values and principles:

Safety: Child safety is paramount and best achieved by supporting children and families within their community.

Permanence and Stability: Children and youth need and have the right to lifelong nurturing and secure relationships that are provided by families who can meet their specific needs. Efforts to identify and secure permanency are continuous and integrated into all stages of involvement with children, youth and families.

Fostering Connections for Youth: As youth transition to adulthood, they benefit from services that promote healthy development, academic success and safe living conditions, as well as establish connections to caring adults who will commit to lasting supportive relationships.

Well-Being: Children's well-being is dependent upon strong and developing families and communities who are meeting their physical, mental, behavioral health, educational and cultural needs.

Family Centered: Families are the primary providers for children's needs. The family is meaningfully involved with the child welfare system throughout the life of the case in a respectful and responsive manner that builds upon its strengths.

Respectful Interactions: Children, youth and families are best served when we educate them regarding the child welfare process, actively listen to them and invite participation in decision making, and empower them to meet their unique and individual needs. Agency practices, service delivery, communications and actions are easily understood and mutually developed.

Cultural Responsiveness: Cultural responsiveness is achieved through understanding and serving children, youth, and families within the context of each unique family and community. This includes, but is not limited to, families' beliefs, values, race, ethnicity, history, tribe, culture, religion and language.

Partnership: Families, communities, and the child welfare system are primary and essential partners in creating and supporting meaningful connections for children and youth in safe and nurturing environments.

Organizational Competence: Wisconsin's child welfare agencies will perform as high quality organizations, guided by a clear mission, priorities and resource allocation, with committed, qualified, trained and skilled staff, management, leadership and providers.



Accountability: We hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards of practice. We recognize our responsibility to children, youth, families and other stakeholders to assess and manage our performance, self-correct, innovate and enhance our ability to achieve positive outcomes through continuous improvement efforts. We manage our resources efficiently, because we value good stewardship of the public trust. We also recognize the need for our practices, service delivery and performance to be easily understood, evaluated, and open to feedback from our stakeholders.

Strategies for Core Practice Functions

To achieve its desired outcomes and align to its values and principles, Wisconsin's public child welfare system will use these strategies for its core practice functions.

As an overarching strategy, maintaining child safety and assessing for risk of future maltreatment are always paramount in all core practice functions. The agency collaborates with the family to conduct an initial assessment and make ongoing assessments of child and family dynamics, strengths, and needs in order to implement effective plans that lead to safe case closure. Additional service planning focuses on meeting the behavioral and physical health, developmental, and educational needs of children involved with public child welfare system.

Engagement

- Engagement begins during the first encounter with the family. Meaningful engagement sets the tone for accommodating, transparent, beneficial, and respectful interactions during every stage of the child welfare involvement to build trust and commitment to the change process.
- Successful engagement applies to interactions with all child welfare partners, such as extended family members, resource families, service providers and community members.

Teaming

- The size, composition and function of the family team are determined by the needs and safety concerns of the family.
- The development of an effective team provides a base for sharing, integrating and using information, resources, strategies, and actions to achieve outcomes.
- Family teams build on the development of constructive and collaborative relationships, so that our efforts can concentrate on identifying and achieving beneficial outcomes.
- Involving the family and those with the skills, family knowledge, and abilities needed to organize effective strategies for a child and family empowers that family to accept ownership of the subsequent assessments, case plans and decisions.
- A primary leadership and coordination role is necessary for convening and facilitating effective family change planning and decision-making.

Assessment

- Ongoing fact-finding and organization of relevant information and knowledge concerning the family is the global responsibility of the team.
- Using the collective knowledge and wisdom of the team to create a shared big picture understanding of the children, youth and family's strengths, needs, and risks reveals what conditions or behaviors must change to achieve desired outcomes.

Planning Strategies to Drive Change

- The team defines the desired outcomes and expectations for the children, youth and family and defines the benchmarks of positive change.
- An ongoing planning process is used that is child focused and family centered, culturally responsive, safety-driven, well informed and well reasoned.
- This process is used to select strategies, interventions and supports, and resources which enable positive change and safe case closure.

Effective and Appropriate Intervention

- Well-informed strategies should be implemented with sufficient effort and precision to be effective in producing expected changes. Strategies that do not work should be stopped promptly and replaced with those most likely to succeed.
- Service interventions should be customized to the individual needs of the family, help families develop the capacity and resourcefulness to achieve sustainable independence, and be coordinated in a way to avoid overwhelming families and unintentionally sabotaging their efforts.

Tracking and Adjustment

- Child and family status, intervention process, progress and problems, and change results are routinely measured and evaluated by the family team.
- Strategies, interventions and supports are modified and adapted to changing conditions and needs, applying knowledge gained and creating a self-correcting process for finding what works for the child and family.

Organizational Strategies

To support its strategies for core practice functions, Wisconsin's Department of Children and Families, working in collaboration with local agencies, will use these organizational strategies:

Organizational Effectiveness

- We ensure that our practice model drives the alignment of our policies, standards, staff development, and organizational competencies. We do this by using effective continuous improvement methods within all agency levels and functions as a way of doing business.

- We partner with families and stakeholders to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data, for the purpose of evaluating service delivery and how well front line practice aligns with the practice model.
- Data drive, inform, and monitor efforts to promote transparency about the strengths and needs within the system, assure competent and equitable service coordination and delivery for all recipients, and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- The quality assurance system supports continual program and service improvement, not just data reporting.
- We develop and implement policies and standards to ensure that children, youth and families are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children. Frontline practice standards are aligned with our practice model and incorporated in agency manuals for staff.

Leadership

- Leaders create, affirm, and sustain an organizational culture and structure that supports a strength-based, family-centered model of practice. Leaders identify and mobilize the strengths of staff and programs and work together to focus on the continuous improvement of programs, services and staff.
- Where obstacles are identified, and/or resource or service gaps exist, leadership will work individually and in partnerships, at local and statewide levels, to define needs and potential solutions, to promote the allocation of appropriate resources and/or remediative strategies.

Cultural Responsiveness

- Services are delivered within the cultural context of the children, youth, and family being served. Practices implemented in the agency are culturally and linguistically sensitive, respectful of human diversity, and applied through an inclusive engagement model for case planning and decision making. The staff and community resources reflect the populations served.

Staff Qualifications, Training and Workload

- We set standards for public and private agency staff that are in accordance with recommended best practice.
- Staff has workloads at a level that permit practice consistent with the practice model, and that are in accord with reasonable expectations and standards.
- We have an overall professional development system that provides an array of supportive staff development services. Staff are recruited, selected, retained, and receive initial and ongoing training to enhance the skills and knowledge they need to carry out their duties related to safety, permanency and well-being.



- Staff performs with a focus on how their work advances our mission, desired outcomes, goals, values, principles and strategies.
- We provide training for current and prospective foster and adoptive parents that enhance the skills and knowledge they need.

Supervision

- We have an effective supervisory structure in place to review and guide key casework decisions, and to provide ongoing coaching, mentoring, consultative support and professional development. Supervisors are well-selected, developed and supported for their roles.

Child Welfare Information Systems

- The information system serves as an efficient and effective tool to help frontline staff manage their cases and support their work.
- Information is accessible to frontline staff, supervisors, managers and administrators on a timely basis to help them analyze and track outcomes and otherwise facilitate their work.

Communication and Coordination

- We provide information in a manner clearly understood by our stakeholders, and we are open to receiving their feedback.
- Staff at the state and local level collaborates with services or programs serving the same population – including public health, mental health, substance abuse, education, medical services, food assistance, financial and work supports – to ensure effective and efficient coordination of programs and services to achieve positive outcomes for children, youth and families.
- We present information to the court such that safety plans and court orders are aligned with each other to best serve children, youth and families.

Resource Identification, Development, and Utilization

- The state and local agencies identify, develop and use community-based services for families involved in the public child welfare system, and work with communities to identify, plan and improve community options for families that seek or require services. Such services are accessible, culturally responsive, and meet the unique needs of children and families in all areas of the state.
- Staff at the state and local level work in partnership with communities to reach out to, educate, offer information to, and support families in need.
- Effective prevention programs are in place that enhances a family's ability to improve upon its strengths and manage its risks to avoid crises.

Community Partnerships

- The state and local agencies function as a member of their community, understand the needs of their community, include community representation in decision making, and work with community leaders, service providers, and tribes to ensure that the identified needs are reflected in the service array.

Required Skills

The following skills are instrumental in the implementation of the practice model and will help guide child welfare workers, leaders, and other staff as well as inform the development of resources and services for families.

Engaging: Effectively establishing a trust-based relationship with children and families, and essential individuals for the purpose of sustaining the work that is to be accomplished together. This includes interacting with families transparently and with empathy, without making assumptions, respecting and learning from the unique characteristics and strengths of the family, and applying this skill to the partnership with the family and the options made available to them.

Teaming: Assembling a group to work with children, youth and families, becoming a member of an established group, and preparing, leading and facilitating a collaborative and trust-based working relationship are necessary for success in bringing needed resources to the critical issues of children, youth and families.

Assessing: Gathering information about reported concerns and family needs, evaluating the relevance of that information as well as identifying family strengths and community and tribal resources that may be applied to address those concerns and needs.

Planning: Setting goals, developing strategies, and prioritizing and sequencing tasks and schedules to accomplish the goals.

Implementing: Identifying and applying the most effective and culturally appropriate services, resources, and processes to meet change plan goals.

Evaluating: Monitoring outcomes of service plans to determine if the desired goals are being achieved and if not, using this information to reconsider goals and strategies developed in the planning phase or services and resources identified in the implementation stage.

Advocating: Recognizing individual or group needs, providing intervention on behalf of a client or client group, communicating to decision makers, and initiating actions to secure or enhance a needed service, resource, or entitlement.



Communicating: Sending and receiving information within the appropriate cultural context, including verbal, non-verbal, electronic, and written messaging, with the aid of a translator or interpreter as needed.

Leading and Supervising: Creating, affirming, and sustaining an organizational culture that supports a strength-based, family-centered model of practice. Identify and mobilize the strengths of staff and work with others to continuously improve programs, services and staff. Provide ongoing coaching, mentoring, consultative support and professional development.

Using Technology: Using current technological equipment and software to gather and manage the information required to communicate, plan, analyze and track results, make decisions, and manage resources.